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Navigating the Excluded Middle: The Jain Logic of Relativity

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Abstract:
The Jain tradition is known for its distinctive approach to prima facie incompatible claims about the nature of reality. The Jain approach to conflicting views is to seek an integration or synthesis, in which apparently contrary views are resolved into a vantage point from which each view can be seen as expressing part of a larger, more complex truth. Viewed by some contemporary Jain thinkers as an extension of the principle of ahiṃsā into the realm of intellectual discourse, Jain logic marks quite a distinctive stance toward the concept of logical consistency. While it does not directly violate the law of excluded middle, it does, one might say, navigate this principle in a highly and potentially useful way. The potential usefulness of Jain logic includes the possibility of its use in arguing for the position known as religious pluralism or worldview pluralism. This is a view which many philosophers see as holding great promise in developing a way to think about differences across worldviews in ways that do not lead to the kind of conflict and polarization that all too often characterizes ideological differences in today's world.
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The Jain Approach to Contradiction

The Jain tradition of India is probably most famous for the intensive practice of *ahiṃṣā*, or harmlessness – typically described by Jain practitioners as nonviolence in thought, word, and deed – which its authoritative teachers enjoin. This observance of nonviolence is so rigorous that it can involve, for mendicant practitioners, the wearing of a *muḥpatti*, or mouth-shield, so the accidental ingestion of tiny living beings can be averted, and the use of a feather whisk to sweep the ground on which one may about to walk, or any surface on which one may be about to sit, in order to avoid accidentally treading or sitting upon any living entity.

In the field of philosophy, however, the Jain tradition is known for its distinctive approach to *prima facie* incompatible claims about the nature of reality. In some ways analogous and in some

ways directly contrary to the famous negative dialectic practiced by the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, the Jain approach to conflicting views is to seek an integration or synthesis, in which apparently contrary views are resolved into a vantage point from which each view can be seen as expressing part of a larger, more complex truth. Viewed by some contemporary Jain thinkers as an extension of the principle of ahiṃsā into the realm of intellectual discourse, Jain logic marks quite a distinctive stance toward the concept of logical consistency[1] [3], [14, pp. 154-165]. While it does not directly violate, as shall be shown here, the law of excluded middle (according to which something must be either *a* or *not-a*, and that there is no logical position between these two possibilities) it does, one might say, navigate this principle in a highly and potentially useful way.

The potential usefulness of Jain logic includes the possibility of its use in arguing for the position known variously as *religious pluralism* or *worldview pluralism* [18], [19]. Developing initially out of conversations amongst primarily Christian theologians and philosophers of religion, religious pluralism is the view that many religions teach important truths about the nature of reality and can lead their practitioners to salvation (however this might be conceived). Worldview pluralism is an attempt to extend this concept further, to encompass not only religious worldviews, but worldviews of all kinds. Typically, religious or worldview pluralism emerges from out of a desire to overcome the many conflicts, often violent, which are fuelled by or rooted in differences among worldviews. Pluralism is seen as an antidote to its opposite, *exclusivism*, which is the claim that one worldview alone is true. In its religious iterations, exclusivism is the view that there is only one true religion and that it alone provides the means by which human beings can be saved (again, whatever 'saved' might mean in the religious context in question).

Pluralism is seen by its proponents as more adequate to the complexity of the reality which human beings inhabit. Religious pluralist John Hick, for example, famously argues that exclusivist views of religion are arbitrary, failing to take into account the fact that religious adherence is not typically a matter of rational reflection, but is largely an accident of birth:

> …[A] "hermeneutic of suspicion" is provoked by the evident fact that in perhaps 99 percent of cases the religion to which one adheres (or against which one reacts) is selected by the accident of birth. Someone born to devout Muslim parents in Iran or Indonesia is very likely to be a Muslim; someone born to devout Buddhist parents in Thailand or Sri Lanka is very likely to be a Buddhist; someone born to devout Christian parents in Italy or Mexico is very likely to be a Catholic Christian; and so on. Thus there is a certain non-rational arbitrariness in the claim that the particular tradition within which one happens to have been born is the one and only true religion. And if the conviction is added that salvation and eternal life depend upon accepting the truths of one's own religion, it may well seem unfair that this saving truth is known only to one group, into which only a minority of the human race have had the good fortune to be born [11, p. 610].

In attempting to address, however, the non-rationality of exclusivism, pluralists typically end up having to solve a different kind of logical conundrum. If affirming the unique truth of one's worldview is arbitrary, with one's worldview being shaped, as it is, by all kinds of prejudices and other factors that are a result of one's location in a particular tradition and a particular society at a particular point in history, and if the alternative being proposed to this arbitrary stance is that there are, in fact, many true worldviews, and many valid and effective paths to humanity's ultimate end, whatever it may be, then one is left with the question of how it is that many worldviews, many of which make mutually contradictory claims, can all be true, and the practices corresponding with them effective.

A variety of approaches to this problem have been attempted by pluralists. Hick argues for a 'Pluralistic Hypothesis,' according to which the diverse worldviews that are found in the religions of the world, "represent different phenomenal awarenesses of the same noumenal reality and evoke parallel salvific transformations of human life" [10, p. 15]. Philosopher Aldous Huxley, on the other

hand, seeks to discern a common core of ideas and practices shared across traditions, which he calls the 'perennial philosophy.' He defines this philosophy as

> the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being [12, p. vii].

Other pluralists argue that approaches such as Hick's and Huxley's fail to do justice to the genuine diversity that exists across worldviews, especially amongst the world's religions, and have sought to develop forms of pluralism that would allow for a variety of salvific goals, as well as a complex vision of reality of which diverse worldviews could be said to articulate specific parts or elements [9], [7].

It is in relation to this latter approach to worldview pluralism that Jain logic would appear to be most promising. Like the pluralists who object to the idea that all worldviews and practices must be aimed at the same ultimate end in order to be valid or effective, and that the areas where many worldviews can be said to be true must necessarily be those in which they are in agreement, or in which they say the same things, traditional Jain philosophers take a non-reductive view of reality, and contrast their position with views which seek to relegate all of reality to just one single principle. Jain logic also entails, as we shall see, that diverse and even apparently contradictory claims can be shown to be true. This eliminates the necessity of focusing solely upon those areas of diverse worldviews that are in agreement with one another.

Jain Logic in Context

The setting in which the Jain approach to contradiction emerges is one in which there is no sharp gulf presumed between the realm of thought and the realm of practice. Like other systems of philosophy that emerge in India, Jain thought emerges within a context of, and ultimately in the service of, practice. Like ancient Greece, where *philosophia*, in its origins, was not an abstract set of claims, but rather reflection occurring in the context of a way of life often involving some kind of spiritual practice, as famously affirmed by Pierre Hadot, India was a cultural environment where philosophical reflection accompanied, supported, and was often occasioned by practice aimed at a goal of transcendence [8]. Hadot defines "spiritual exercises" as activities that are "intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subjects who practice them" [8, p. 6]. This definition certainly applies to the various ethical, ritual, and contemplative practices that are understood to accompany most of the systems of Indian philosophy. Indeed, it can sometimes be very difficult to grasp what Indian philosophers are saying if one is not attentive to the context of practice in which they are operating, particularly when they refer to meditative states, ritual injunctions, and so on. This is as true of Jain philosophers as it is of thinkers in other Indic traditions, whose reflections are carried out in the service of practices such as those associated with the ideal of ahiṃsā.

Indeed, Jainism scholar Piotr Balcerowicz traces the origins of the Jain approach to logic to the practices of Jain ascetics seeking to take care not to destroy small life forms:

> …[W]hat apparently prompted the [Jain] enquiry into the multi-faceted nature of the world and the methods of its reliable reproduction in the human mind and language were not theoretical philosophical concerns but rather the…interests or moral concerns of the ascetic: what objects can be hurt by his actions and what objects are generally immune from injury. The earliest applications of analytical tools [later commonly used by Jain thinkers], such as standpoints (*nikṣepa*, *nyāsa*), viewpoints (*naya*) or…modal description (*sapta-bhaṅgī*, *syād-vāda*), would always attempt to define what objects are living and what are lifeless, which is the space inhabitable by the living beings where they can be hurt, and which is not, etc. For a community of ascetics admitting that even some minerals, drops of water, [and] particles of fire and air can be animate and can suffer at

> their hands was indeed a serious worry. For someone who believed that souls (*jīva*) could be present in numerous physical forms, it was vital to determine which forms of particles could contain a soul which could potentially experience pain [1, p. 326].

Jain philosophy thus clearly emerges in the context of providing support for a way of life aimed at a spiritual goal.

While it would not be correct simply to conflate Jain philosophy, or any system of Indian philosophy with religion, given that the practice of a religion is largely a matter of acculturation, whereas the practice of philosophy requires rigorous specialized training and is largely carried out only by those who have this particular expertise, understanding this system of philosophy requires us to be attentive to practice in the service of which it is pursued. Otherwise, aspects of this system of thought will no doubt appear confusing.

In terms of its own self-understanding, Jain teaching is co-extensive with the nature of reality itself: with the true nature of things (*tattvārtha*) as proclaimed by a beginningless and endless series of omniscient teachers, or 'Ford makers' (*tīrthaṅkara*s) who appear periodically among human beings in order to establish a 'ford' or 'crossing' over the ocean of birth, death, and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) to the 'further shore' of liberation (*mokṣa*) from this beginningless and potentially endless cycle. Twenty-four Ford makers appear over the course of a single *kalpa*, or cosmic epoch. The most recent of these figures, and the twenty-fourth Ford maker of the current epoch–Vardhamāna Jñātṛputra, or Mahāvīra, the 'Great Hero,' as he is more widely known, lived from approximately 599 to 527 BCE.

According to Jaina tradition, Mahāvīra, like his junior contemporary, the Buddha, was born to wealth and privilege but renounced his position in order to find a path to freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth. After twelve years of rigorous ascetic practice and meditation, Mahāvīra is said to have attained the goal of the Jaina path of purification. Having conquered the passions (*kaṣāya*s) of his lower self, he became a *Jina*, a 'victor' or 'conqueror' (hence the name *Jaina* or Jain, for a follower of Mahāvīra). At this point, at the age of forty-two, it is believed by Jainas that he attained *kevalajñāna*: absolute knowledge, or complete omniscience. It is on the authority of this absolute knowledge that the Jaina tradition proclaims its doctrines and fundamental worldview, the teachings of Mahāvīra as preserved in the Jain scriptures, or *Āgamas*. Therefore, despite its later emphasis on the validation of its teachings through a process of logical argumentation, the Jaina tradition "in actuality shows many of the characteristics of a revealed religion of the Judaeo-Christian-Moslem type" [5, p. 77].

A common problem faced by both the Buddha and Mahāvīra, according to the texts of their respective religious communities, was the positing of *avyākata*, or unanswerable, questions by their followers–metaphysical and cosmological questions which were major sources of controversy among the various schools of thought existing at the time. The Buddha, as portrayed in the Pāli literature, often refused to answer these questions, viewing them as not conducive to edification. But when he did choose to answer them, the method by which he dealt with such questions came to be called the *vibhajya*, or analytical, method. This method involves relativizing the terms in which the questions are phrased. According to Bimal Krishna Matilal, Jain logic developed from a similar strategy which was pursued, according to the earliest extant Jain texts, by Mahavīra [16, pp. 19-29].

As translated by Matilal, the Buddhist *Majjhimanikāya* (*Cūlamālunkya Sutta*) lists the ten *avyākata* questions as follows:

1. Is the *loka* (world, man) eternal?
2. Is the *loka* not eternal?
3. Is it (the *loka*) finite (with an end)?
4. Is it not finite?
5. Is that which is the body the soul? (Is the soul identical with the body?)
6. Is the soul different from the body?
7. Does the *Tathāgata* [the Buddha, or any liberated being] exist after death?
8. Does he not exist after death?
9. Does he both exist and not exist after death?
10. Does he neither exist nor not exist after death? [16, p. 12]

As he is depicted in the Buddhist texts, the Buddha viewed passionate attachment to particular philosophical views on questions such as these as being no less of a hindrance to spiritual progress than other kinds of passionate attachment, such as greed or lust. From a Buddhist perspective, in other words, attachment to such views (*dṛṣṭis*) is, in a way, more dangerous than other kinds of attachment. This is because those who are attached to a particular view may be under the illusion that this view will lead them to liberation. This intuition of the dangers of attachment to views gradually developed into the negating dialectical method of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka school of Buddhism. Nāgārjuna does not posit a view of his own, but rather shows the problems inherent in the views of others. "This is the sole concern of the Madhyamika, to analyse the positions of the opponent, not to put forward counter-positions which might entail something of their own capable of resisting analysis" [23, p. 146].

The Buddha's approach to *avyākata* questions can be seen as an attempt to avoid philosophical extremes, to walk a 'middle path' between the various views current in his time by refusing to embrace any of them. The first four questions, about the world's having or not having a beginning or an end, he simply refused to answer. The fifth and sixth questions, regarding the identity or non-identity of the soul and the body, he addressed with his *anātman* doctrine, which denies an independently existing soul, but is not a materialism or a physicalism either. The remaining four questions he answered in the negative, giving rise to the *catuṣkoṭivinirmuktatvam*, or Fourfold Negation, of Buddhism. Truth, according to Buddhism is finally not something that can be encompassed in any philosophical claim.

Matilal suggests that the Jaina doctrines of relativity developed from an analogous strategy on the part of Mahāvīra, as portrayed in the Jaina *Āgama*s, for dealing with the *avyākata* questions. Unlike the Buddha, however, Mahāvīra replies to these questions in the affirmative. He answers the *avyākata* questions with a qualified "Yes" rather than a "No." This approach is seen by Jainas to demonstrate Mahāvīra's omniscience. Matilal characterizes this approach as an "'inclusive' middle," in contrast with the Buddhists' "'exclusive' middle," path. The Buddha avoids exclusivist, dogmatic attachment to particular views by rejecting all of them. Mahāvīra avoids such attachment by incorporating all views equally into his own. The eventual development of the Jaina doctrines of *anekāntavāda* (the doctrine of the complexity of reality), *nayavāda* (the doctrine of perspectives), and *syādvāda* (the doctrine of conditional predication) roughly around the time of the rise of Madhyamaka Buddhism, can be seen as a Jain parallel to the Buddhist Madhyamaka dialectic. Mahāvīra's positive use of *vibhajyavāda*, the analysis of the *avyākata* questions into their component parts, is illustrated in the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*, a text of the Jaina *Āgamas*:

> [T]he Venerable Mahāvīra told the Bhikkhu Jamāli thus:…[T]he world is, Jamāli, eternal. It did not cease to exist at any time. It was, it is and it will be. It is constant, permanent, eternal, imperishable, indestructible, always existent.
> The world is, Jamāli, non-eternal. For it becomes progressive (in time-cycle) after being regressive. And it becomes regressive after becoming progressive.
> The soul is, Jamāli, eternal. For it did not cease to exist at any time. The soul is, Jamāli, non-eternal. For it becomes animal after being a hellish creature, becomes a man after becoming an animal and it becomes a god after being a man (*Bhagavatī Sūtra* 9:386) [16, p. 19].

According to the Jaina tradition, because of his omniscience, a *kevalin*, such as Mahāvīra, can see the complexity of reality from all of its various perspectives and thus answer deep metaphysical questions from all of these various relatively valid points of view. Thus, from the perspective of permanence–of the fact that "it did not cease to exist at any time…it was, it is and it will be"–the world is, according to Mahāvīra, eternal. From the perspective of change, on the other hand, the world is affirmed to be "non-eternal."[2]

Similarly, from the perspective of its innate qualities, the soul, or *jīva*, is eternal. "It did not cease to exist any time." But from the perspective of its karmically determined experiences within the realm of *saṃsāra*, its rebirths in numerous different forms, it is non-eternal. The point of view of the omniscient *kevalin* encompasses all these varied perspectives. As a result, Mahāvīra can address these and many other *avyākata* or unanswerable questions in all of their various dimensions.

The systematization of the approach to the nature of reality suggested by Mahāvīra's teaching as presented in the Jaina *Āgamas*, texts dating, for the most part, to roughly a couple of centuries before the Common Era, is left to Umāsvāti, a Jain thinker who lived around the second or third century of the Common Era and who authored the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*. This text summarizes the teachings of the *Āgamas* and itself possesses "quasi-scriptural status" [5, p. 75].

Most relevant to the development of Jain logic are the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*'s systematizations of the notions of *satsāmānya*, *nikṣepa*, and *naya*. *Satsāmānya* refers to the general characteristics shared by everything that exists: the basic nature of a real thing. These are, according to Umāsvāti's famous formula: "Existence is that which is linked to emergence, perishing, and duration."[3] The importance of this formula for the Jain tradition has to do with the character of the soul, or *jīva*, and the process of its liberation. Unlike Advaita Vedānta, which affirms the ultimate permanence of Brahman as the underlying ground of all reality, and Buddhism, which affirms radical impermanence and the *lack* of any underlying ground as the defining characteristic of existence, Jainism affirms the coexistence of permanence and impermanence, identity and difference, in the nature of the *jīva*; for the *jīva* is held to be, in one sense, permanent–eternally possessing the inherent characteristics of infinite perception, bliss, energy, and consciousness–but in another sense, impermanent–inasmuch as its status vis-a-vis its karmic accretions is constantly changing and different from moment to moment. In contrast with both Advaitic and Buddhist tendencies toward idealism, the Jain tradition thus affirms a metaphysical realism which accepts the phenomena of the emergence, perishing, and (finite) duration of all entities as fundamental to its soteriology.

The pluralistic character of reality which Jainism affirms–its claim both that there are a variety of substances (*dravyas*) constituting the world and that these entities have a variety of aspects (aspects having to do with their emergence, perishing, and endurance over time) – gives rise to the variety of perspectives from which a philosophical issue can be addressed: the varied relative perspectives from which Mahāvīra is depicted as addressing metaphysical questions in texts like the *Bhagavatī Sūtra* [13, p. 81].[4] Although it is not yet called this in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*, this conception of reality as having many facets or aspects is, in its essence, the doctrine of *anekāntavāda*. The perspectivalism which it entails as its epistemological correlate is later expressed in the doctrine of *nayavāda*. This perspectivalism is articulated in the *Āgama* literature and systematized by Umāsvāti in the two interrelated concepts of *nikṣepa* and *naya*.

A *nikṣepa*, or 'gateway of investigation,' is a topic in terms of which a particular entity can be analyzed. Umāsvāti lists the *nikṣepa*s as *nāma* (name), *sthāpanā* (symbol), *dravya* (potentiality), *bhāvata* (actuality), *nirdeśa* (definition), *svāmitva* (possession), *sādhana* (cause), *adhikaraṇa* (location), *sthiti* (duration), *vidhānata* (variety), *sat* (existence), *saṃkhyā* (numerical determination), *kṣetra* (field occupied), *sparśana* (field touched), *kāla* (time, continuity), *antara* (time-lapse), *bhāva* (states), and *alpabahutva* (relative numerical strength). *Naya*s are philosophical perspectives from which a particular topic can be viewed and which determine the conclusions that can be reached about it. Umāsvāti lists them as seven–*naigamanaya* (common person's view), *saṃgrahanaya* (generic view), *vyavahāranaya* (practical view), *ṛjusūtranaya* (linear view), *śabdanaya* (literal view), *samabhirūḍhanaya* (etymological view), and *evaṃbhūtanaya* (actuality view). Umāsvāti's commentators see these seven *naya*s as partial views which collectively make up a valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) [21, pp. 8, 23].

Siddhasena Dīvākara, a Jaina thinker of roughly the fifth century of the Common Era, takes the next major step in the development of Jaina logic. Siddhasena's contribution can be found in his text, the *Sanmatitarka*, or 'The Logic of the True Doctrine,' in which he divides Umāsvāti's seven *nayas* into two major categories: those which affirm the substantiality of existence (*dravyāstikanaya*s) and those which affirm the impermanent, changing aspects of existence (*paryāyāstikanaya*s). In this text, Siddhasena sets the tone for subsequent Jaina thinkers by affirming that substantiality and modality, permanence and impermanence, identity and difference, are all necessary elements in any adequate account of reality. As one may recall, this understanding has its origins in Jaina beliefs about the soul as having a permanent, intrinsic character while simultaneously undergoing a series of constantly changing, karmically determined states. Beginning with Siddhasena, however, this understanding of reality as

complex, as characterized by a variety of seemingly contrary aspects, was to become the chief criterion in terms of which all philosophical claims would be assessed: the essence, as it were, of Jain logic.

Two further innovations in the interpretation of *nayavāda* which Siddhasena introduces in this text are, first of all, to affirm, while yet retaining the traditional list of seven *naya*s, that the number of *naya*s, or perspectives on reality, is potentially limitless. In this regard, his distinction between the *dravyāstikanaya* and the *paryāyāstikanaya* becomes definitive, in a sense, of extreme polarities, between which a vast range of views can exist on a spectrum and be ranked in terms of their adherence to one or another of these extremes, with the Jain position being established firmly in the middle.

Secondly, Siddhasena goes on to identify the *naya*s with the positions of various non-Jaina schools of thought. He thus sets the stage for what would become the standard Jaina criticism of non-Jaina views as advocating one or another extreme position to the exclusion of the rest. He also defines the criterion by which the validity of the use of a *naya* is to be assessed as the extent to which that usage is in conformity with traditional Jain doctrine. All of these ideas, as set forth in the following verses from the *Sanmatitarka*, were to become standard for subsequent Jaina philosophers:

> A well-presented view of the form of [a] *naya* only lends support to the Āgamic doctrines while the same, if ill presented, destroys both (i.e. itself as well as its rival).
> There are as many views of the form of *nayas* as there are ways of speaking, while there are as many rival (non-Jaina) tenets as there are views of the form of *nayas*.
> Kāpila's philosophy [Sāṃkhya] is a statement of the *dravyāstika* viewpoint while Buddha's that of the *paryāyāstika*.
> As for Kaṇāda [the founder of the Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy, which upholds the existence of both substances (*dravya*s) and qualities (*guṇa*s), but as independently existing entities in a relation of "inherence" (*samavāya*)], his doctrine, even if supported by both viewpoints is false inasmuch as each here gives primacy to itself and is independent of the other (Siddhasena Dīvākara, *Sanmatitarka* 3:46-49) [4, pp. 110-111].

Finally, in this text, Siddhasena sets forth *syādvāda* and its method of sevenfold predication (*saptabhaṅgīnaya*). We shall return to this doctrine and discuss it in greater detail later.

Siddhasena's affirmation of the necessary complementarity of contraries in the description of an entity in his *Sanmatitarka*, and the basic agenda for Jain philosophy which it outlines, is taken up and further elaborated by his contemporary (or near contemporary), Samantabhadra, another fifth-century Jaina thinker, in his *Āptamīmāṃsā*, or 'An Examination of the Authoritative Teacher.' As Krishna Kumar Dixit writes:

> Samantabhadra had a clear consciousness of what constitutes the central contention of *Anekāntavāda* [or *syādvāda*], viz. that a thing must be characterised by two mutually contradictory features at one and the same time. He also realised that the doctrine was applicable rather universally; that is to say, he felt that taking any thing and any feature at random it could be shown that this thing is characterised by this feature as also by the concerned contradictory feature [4, p. 136].

This is, essentially, is what Samantabhadra does in the *Āptamīmāṃsā*. He applies a conception of reality as necessarily involving contrary attributes to the resolution, through synthesis, of a variety of philosophical topics–being and non-being, unity and plurality, permanence and impermanence, identity and difference, idealism and materialism, and so on. He thereby sets the stage for centuries of philosophical analysis of the prima facie incompatible claims of diverse schools of thought by his successors in the Jain tradition.

In the centuries to come, many other Jain thinkers would continue to develop these ideas much further; but the essential contours of Jain logic were set in place by Siddhasena and Samantabhadra.

Anekāntavāda, Nayavāda, and Syādvāda: The Jaina Doctrines of Relativity

Let us turn now from intellectual history and context to an analysis of Jaina logic itself. The terms *anekāntavāda*, *nayavāda*, and *syādvāda*, though frequently used interchangeably in both primary and secondary texts, can be seen to denote three distinct doctrines which collectively constitute the systematic philosophical position which I call the 'Jaina philosophy of relativity.'

Anekāntavāda, first of all, may be translated literally as 'non-one-sided-doctrine,' 'many-sided doctrine,' or 'doctrine of many-sidedness.' Satkari Mookerjee's translation, 'philosophy of non-absolutism,' is useful up to a point, but ultimately deceptive, inasmuch as it might be taken to imply that there is *no* absolute viewpoint within Jain philosophy [17]. According to Jain thought, though, as we have seen, such a viewpoint does exist: namely, the viewpoint that encompasses all others, the viewpoint of those fully enlightened and liberated omniscient beings (*kevalins*) such as Mahāvīra whose souls (*jīvas*) have been liberated from all inessential defiling matter (*karma*) and so shine forth in their true, essential nature of perfect knowledge (*jñāna*), energy (*vīrya*), bliss (*sukha*) and perception (*darśanas*)–and hence the inappropriateness of either 'relativism' or 'non-absolutism' to translate *anekāntavāda*. 'Non-absolutism' is, however, a perfectly fine translation of *anekāntavāda* if it is taken to apply only to the epistemic situation of non-omniscient beings.

Anekāntavāda is an ontological doctrine. Its fundamental claim, as it eventually came to be understood by the tradition, is that all existent entities have infinite attributes.

This claim stems from the ontological realism which characterizes the Jaina position–that is, according to Jainism, reality is essentially as we perceive it. The apparent contradictions–the Kantian antinomies–that our perceptions involve, such as continuity and change, emergence and perishing, permanence and flux, identity and difference, actually do reflect the interdependent, relationally constituted nature of things. Reality is a synthesis of opposites. As we have seen, this character of reality is reflected in the definition of existence presented in the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*.

Consequently, it is not inconsistent with the nature of reality to affirm contrary attributes of any given entity. The number of possible predications which can validly be made of an entity is heightened to infinity by the fact that, unlike other Indian (and Western) notions of a substance as having no real relations with any other entity, Jainism affirms a definition of an entity which includes within itself the entity's relations, both of being and of non-being, with every other entity constituting the cosmos. A pot, therefore, is related to all other pots, in part, by having all of the qualities which go into making a pot a pot (that is, a member of the category 'pot'); but it is also related to pens, in part, (albeit negatively) by its not possessing pen qualities [17, pp. 23-48]. It can therefore be asserted that, from a certain perspective (that of being a pot), the pot exists; whereas, from another perspective (that of being a pen–that is, of having pen-qualities) the pot does not exist–that is, it contains within its definition non-being with respect to pen-qualities. It does not exist *qua* pen. The Jain definition of an entity thus includes, in the form of its internal relations with them, both positive and negative, every other entity in the cosmos.

Epistemologically, *anekāntavāda*, with its affirmation that every entity possesses infinite attributes, entails *nayavāda*. This term is best translated as the 'doctrine of perspectives.' The gist of this doctrine has already been presented above. All entities possess infinite attributes. Some of these attributes, such as emergence and perishing, are prima facie incompatible. One may therefore make infinitely many, and sometimes prima facie mutually incompatible, claims about the character of an entity–such as, "It is in the nature of an entity to endure over time," or "It is the nature of an entity to perish." The truth of one's affirmations about any entity depend upon the perspective from which those affirmations are made. Truth–and, consequently, knowledge–is a function of one's perspective (*naya*). This, at least, is the case for non-omniscient beings, who only, by definition, grasp but a portion of reality within the field of our limited awareness. We are like the blind people in the famous Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant. We perceive reality only to the extent that we can grasp it, not in its totality.

The doctrine of *naya*s enables the Jains to avoid the charge of self-contradiction in their attribution of prima facie incompatible characteristics to a given entity. No violation of the law of

non-contradiction is entailed; for it is not the case that the Jains make incompatible predications of an entity in the same sense, but in different senses, from different *naya*s. In other words, the Jainas do not claim, for example, that an entity both exists and does not exist in the same sense. But in different senses, from different perspectives, the entity *can* be said both to exist and not to exist (*qua* pot, for example, but not *qua* pen).

This doctrine is illustrated famously by the example of the golden crown. A golden crown comes into the possession of a king. His son, the prince, wants to keep the crown, but the queen wants it melted down and made into a necklace. The king acquiesces to the wishes of his wife and the crown is melted down. The queen is delighted to have a new necklace. The prince is disappointed that the coveted crown has been destroyed. The king, however, is indifferent, for the amount of gold in question has remained the same. These three are viewing the entity in question from the perspectives, respectively, of emergence, perishing, and duration. The former state (*paryāya*) of the substance (*dravya*) of the gold has passed away–the crown. A new state has taken its place–the necklace. But the substance, the gold, constituted by its essential qualities (*guṇas*), persists. In one sense, a new entity has come into being. In another, an entity has been destroyed. And in yet another, no change has occurred. This illustrates the complex character of reality.

As indicated earlier, the perspectives of emergence, perishing, and duration are not the only *naya*s affirmed in Jain philosophy. According to later interpretations, the number of *naya*s is potentially infinite. "Reality is many-faced (*anantadharmakātmakaṃ vastu*) and intelligence is selective. There are, therefore, as many ways of knowing (*naya*s) as there are faces to reality" [2]. As we have seen, though, a standardized list of seven *naya*s is articulated in a number of Jain philosophical texts, like the *Tattvārtha Sūtra*. These texts come to be identified by Jain thinkers with the perspectives of various non-Jain systems of Indian philosophy.

Again, Jain thought is not a complete relativism. It is not the case that 'anything goes' in Jain logic. There is a Jain theory of error. According to this theory, the worst philosophical error that one can commit–and which, finally, is the root of all error–is *ekāntatā*, that is one-sidedness, or exclusivism, in making one's philosophical assertions.

A common illustration in Jain texts of the limitations of *ekāntatā* is the dispute–quite heated in Indian philosophical discourse–between *nityatvavāda* and *anityatvavāda*. *Nityatvavāda*, or eternalism, the view according to which there is such a thing as a permanently enduring substance is correct if affirmed from the perspective of the enduring nature of a thing, but incorrect inasmuch as it rules out its antithesis. Similarly, the contrary view, *anityatvavāda*, or the affirmation of impermanence as the essential nature of things is correct if it is affirmed of the constantly changing modal nature of things, but incorrect inasmuch as it rules out the permanently enduring aspect of a substance. The truth, of course, is *nityānityatvavāda*. Reality is, in different senses, both eternal and non-eternal, according to the synthesizing Jaina perspective.

The Jaina conceptualization of alternative schools of thought, then, is of these schools as representing partially correct, but incomplete, *ekānta naya*s. Like Alfred North Whitehead, the Jaina tradition can be interpreted as affirming that, "The chief danger to philosophy is narrowness in the selection of evidence" [22, p. 337]. This is the realist thesis that any metaphysical system which bases itself on only one dimension of experience errs inasmuch as it rules out the validity of all other possible perspectives. According to the Jaina version of realism, *ekāntatā* leads to *māyāvāda*–the thesis that the bulk of human experience, such as the element of change, or of continuity, is the result of illusion (*māyā*). This view is rejected by the Jains as destructive of human religious and moral aspirations and activities [20, p. 178]. Unlike traditions like Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta, which teach that seeing phenomenal reality as ultimately unreal is salutary and conducive to detachment (*vairagya*), Jaina thinkers see such perceptions as undermining the urgency of spiritual practice.

One can thus see that the concerns of the Jaina intellectual tradition are not confined to the realm of philosophy, in the straightforward sense of inquiry into the nature of reality, but extend to the realm of 'meta-philosophy' as well–that is, reflection on and discussion of what constitutes the proper nature of philosophical discourse itself [6]. This brings us, finally, to a discussion of *syādvāda*, translatable literally as the 'maybe doctrine,' but more accurately as the 'doctrine of

conditional or qualified assertion.' This is the doctrine of the proper formulation and analysis of philosophical propositions in light of the philosophy of relativity.

In the discussion of *nayavāda*, it was stated that, according to the dominant Jain theory of error, one commits falsehood only by stating propositions exclusivistically or one-sidedly, as reflecting the only possible truth of the matter at hand, and as exclusive of any possible antithesis. Consequently, according to later Jain thought, one states a true proposition only when one speaks in a non-exclusive manner. The mark of this non-exclusive, non-absolutist form of speech is the qualification of one's philosophical statements with the Sanskrit modifier '*syāt*,' hence the name '*syādvāda*,' or '*syāt*-doctrine,' for the Jain doctrine of the proper formulation and expression of philosophical claims [16, pp. 52-53].

What does the word '*syāt*' mean? In ordinary Sanskrit usage, '*syāt*' is the third-person singular optative form of the verbal root *as*, meaning 'exist.' '*Syāt*' thus normally means 'it could be,' 'it should be,' 'maybe,' or 'it is possible that…' But in the context of its usage as a technical term in Jain philosophy, it is stipulated that *syāt* is *not* the third-person singular optative form of 'exist,' but an indeclinable particle (*nipāta*). In its normal usage, *syāt* conveys indefiniteness. But this is not adequate to what Jain thinkers intend when using this term to qualify philosophical claims. Quite an opposite meaning is, in fact, intended; for the point of *syādvāda* is ultimately to *dis*ambiguate language, to coordinate the exclusive, one-sided claims made by competing schools of thought with partially valid perspectives, or *naya*s, understood as such in terms of Jain thought. As Samantabhadra explains:

> In the sentences of the position of relativity there is a movement towards specificity (*viśeṣanam*). [This occurs] due to the connection of the meaning of the particle (*nipāta*) '*syāt*' with Your [Mahāvīra's] absolute perspective.
> Due to its renunciation of absolutism, *syādvāda* [could be taken to mean] 'somehow' or 'sometimes' [in other words, to convey a sense of indefiniteness]. But in the method of sevenfold predication [to be explained shortly] it means 'in some specific sense.'[5]

In Jaina technical usage, then, *syāt* conveys the meaning 'in some specific sense, or from some specific perspective, it is certainly the case that….' According to Ācārya Mahāprajñā, a Jaina thinker of the modern period, in order for a statement to be valid according to *syādvāda*, to convey a true understanding, it must include not only the modifier '*syāt*'–which, as we have seen, in ordinary usage conveys a sense of indefiniteness–but the modifier '*eva*' as well. In a sense the opposite of '*syāt*' in ordinary Sanskrit usage, *eva* is typically used to give emphasis, to indicate that something is *certainly* the case, or that what is being said is of special importance. It tends to have the same function as the old English word 'verily,' and is frequently translated as such in early English renditions of Sanskrit texts. The pairing of *syāt* with *eva* is intended to convey the synthesis of the relative and the absolute that it is the purpose of *syādvāda* to effect–the idea that the truth of a claim is relative to the perspective from which it is made, but that, given this specification, definite truth-claims are possible. In the words of Ācārya Mahāprajñā:

> In the absence of relativism [i.e. relativity] indicated by the phrase 'in some respect' (*syāt*) the use of the expression 'certainly' (*eva*) would confer an absolutistic import on the propositions. But by the use of the word '*syāt*' (in some respect) indicative of relativism [i.e. relativity], the expression 'certainly' (*eva*) loses the absolutistic import and confers definiteness on the intended attributes predicated in the propositions [15, pp. 18-19].

According to Siddhasena, there are seven possible applications of '*syāt*' which exhaust the possible truth values of a proposition. These seven applications of *syāt* do not correspond to the traditional seven *naya*s, but their purpose is the same: to situate various views as parts of the whole constituted by the synthetic perspective of Jain philosophy.

According to Samantabhadra, the seven possible truth-values of a given proposition *p* are:

1. In a sense/from one point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) true.
2. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) not true.
3. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) both true and not true.
4. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) inexpressible.
5. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) both true and inexpressible.
6. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) both not true and inexpressible.
7. In another sense/from another point of view (*syāt*) *p* is certainly (*eva*) true, not true and inexpressible.

In order to illustrate the function of *syādvāda* in the analysis of a proposition, let us return to our friend, the pot, and analyze the unqualified proposition "The pot exists":

1. In a sense (that of possessing the defining characteristics of a pot), the pot certainly does exist.
2. In another sense (that of possessing some characteristics incompatible with those of a pot, such as the characteristics unique to a pen), the pot certainly does not exist (that is, it does not possess those non-pot characteristics).
3. In another sense (the two aforementioned senses taken in successive conjunction with one another), the pot certainly both does and does not exist. (It exists with respect to some characteristics and not others).
4. In another sense (the first two senses taken in simultaneous conjunction with one another), the character of the pot certainly is inexpressible. (This is the sense in which the concrete character of the pot cannot be captured in words but, in Wittgenstein's terminology, can only be "shown." This is the point at which the limits of our concepts and our language are surpassed.)
5. In another sense (the first sense combined with the fourth), the pot certainly both exists and is inexpressible.
6. In another sense, (the second sense combined with the fourth) the pot certainly does not exist and is inexpressible.
7. In another sense (the third sense combined with the fourth) the pot certainly both does and does not exist and is inexpressible.

This sevenfold application of *syāt* is seen as universally applicable and exhaustive of the possible truth-values that a given proposition can convey. *Syādvāda* is, in fact, applied by Jain logicians to a wide variety of topics. It represents Jain dialectical logic at its most sophisticated and yet is elegantly simple. As Matilal summarizes it, "Add a *syāt* particle to the proposition and you have captured the truth" [16, p. 3].

The seven applications of *syāt* are not, according to the tradition, arbitrary. They really do reflect the possible number of truth-claims which can logically be made with respect to a given proposition; for further combinations of the first four applications (e.g. "In a certain sense, *x* is true, true, not true, and inexpressible.") are redundant, while it is argued that applications five, six, and seven amount to distinctive truth-claims, and not mere repetitions of the first four distinct possibilities [17, pp. 117-120].

The only limitation on the universality of the application of *syādvāda* is that placed by the insistence of the tradition that the seven possible truth-values of a given proposition–the senses in which a given proposition can be said to be true–as well as the perspectives (*naya*s) from which these truth-values can be affirmed, must be consistent with the Jain worldview. The introduction of this normative standard into the Jain philosophy of relativity is what prevents it, again, from being a form of relativism in the extreme sense. It is not the case that *any* proposition can be true in *any* sense, but only in senses specifiable from within a correct understanding of reality: and for a Jain at least, that will be a Jain understanding of reality.

Conclusion

Although the situation of the Jaina philosophy of relativity within the context of the Jaina worldview has the salutary effect of preventing this philosophy from lapsing into an incoherent relativism, it also raises the question of the applicability of this philosophy, as discussed at the start of this essay, to a model of worldview pluralism. Is this truly a model suited for pluralism, or is it a parochial Jain way of approaching philosophical difference? Is its relevance confined only to the Jain tradition, or is this system of logic, in a sense, "exportable"? That is, could it also be deployed from within a more neutral worldview that is seeking to coordinate amongst the many worldviews available within humanity's many religions and philosophies? Could this potentially raise the kinds of issues of cultural appropriation that the is involved in, for example, the modern discourse of yoga? Or could it be hailed as a gift from the Jaina tradition to a human species which is still struggling with the coexistence of diverse belief systems? This question is beyond the scope of this essay; but it is the hope of this author that Jaina logic can, indeed, be utilized in a way which can give hope to a world wracked by conflict and worsening polarization.

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Notes

1. Jainism scholar John Cort has demonstrated that, historically, Jaina logic does *not* function as a form of intellectual *ahiṃsā*, but as a device for showing the superiority of a Jain worldview over other, merely partially true alternatives. The prospect that this system of logic can, however, in principle be utilized to advance a more accommodating way of approaching diverse worldviews is not thereby excluded.
2. The "progressive" and "regressive" time-cycles–called the *utsarpiṇī* and *avasarpiṇī*, respectively–are periods of increasing good and bad qualities, each of which characterizes half of a *kalpa*, or cosmic epoch according to traditional Jain cosmology.
3. *Tattvārtha Sūtra* 5:29, translation mine.
4. The dravyas making up existence, according to Jain teaching, are *dharma* (the principle of motion), *adharma* (the principle of inertia), *ākāśa* (space), *pudgala* (matter), *kāla* (time), and *jīva* (life, or soul). To these six, a seventh, *abhāva*, or absence, is added by some thinkers, though others argue that absence is not really an entity and that its addition to the list of dravyas is superfluous. In keeping with later Jain philosophy, though, absence refers to the non-presence in a particular location and at a particular time of a specific quality, characteristic, or entity.
5. *Āptamīmāṃsā* 103-104, translation mine.